

people. Because of diverse cultural orientation, there may be multiple meanings of a particular object, a person or an event to be interpreted by different organizational members. Cultural understanding leads the investigator to look for symbolic forms through which and in which such conceptions of the object, the person, the social event and the world view are articulated and displayed.

### Emphasis upon Explanation of Human Affairs

No single organizational member can obtain a vista for all aspects of an organization. Each individual member has his/her version of a particular organizational culture.

To describe an organization resembles an effort to describe a cloud in the sky. It is there but it is in constant flux, and, depending upon your place and angle of vision—whether you are above or below, outside or inside of it—its shape and texture changes considerably. Any yet all valid descriptions of the cloud can be used and contrasted to explain the properties and attributes of the cloud, and to investigate the reasons for its origin, evolution and future pattern. There is more than one way to slice an organizational culture. Looking at organization as a cultural entity, one can start to understand and appreciate the existence of kaleidoscopic images of organization.

Culture is the way in which people cope with experience. The cultural approach differs from that of psychology in its affirmation that culture is collective, and beyond individual psychology.

People are usually not conscious of cultural boundaries unless certain events or phenomena challenge their beliefs, attitudes or modes of behavior. Insiders of an organization may not be aware of the structural framework that supports their patterned manner of organizational cultural behavior, no more than they are conscious of the linguistic grammar when they speak in their mother tongue, or the musical scales when they sing folk songs. The role of an industrial ethnographer is to search for covert systems of meanings that bind behavioral manifestation. The ethnographer attempts to decipher the subjective/objective meanings of human experience and their internal logic. The cultural approach raises our awareness of implicit premises that explain why a people do things. It attempts to describe a quality internal to the people.

## Organizational Culture: Revisiting the Small-Society Metaphor

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The assumption that formal organizations (i.e., those organized for a specific purpose) have cultures has not been challenged seriously in the literature. For twenty years or more, a varied assortment of scholars have likened organizations to “societies writ small” (Silverman 1970; Aillaire and Firsirotu 1984). From this metaphor there has emerged a logic which holds that, since organizations are like societies and societies have cultures, then organizations must have cultures. Indeed, there is substantial evidence to support at least part of this logic. Like societies, organizations are more-or-less coherent, bounded social systems that display social structures and norms, socialize their members, and dispense sanctions.

Like all analogies, however, the “societies writ small” construct is less than perfect. Organizations are, after all, not really societies but subsystems of a larger social order. The differences between societies and organizations are non-trivial and relevant to a discussion of organizational culture. These differences include the following:

1) *Secondary/Tertiary Socialization versus Enculturation.* Although organizations do socialize their members, such socialization is probably secondary or tertiary (i.e., subsidiary) to earlier (primary) socialization or enculturation processes experienced by an individual from the time of birth.

2) *Partial versus Total Life Experience.* While some organizations are total in the sense of providing a complete immersion experience (e.g., prisons, mental hospitals), most American organizations do not attempt to organize and/or influence all aspects of their members' lives. Further, most organizations do not provide their members with exposure to a complete array of possible life experiences.

3) *Partial versus Complete Demographic Structure.* The membership characteristics of most organizations do not accurately reflect, and usually are much more limited than, the full demographic structure of the larger societal population (i.e., with respect to age, gender, ethnic representation, etc.).

4) *Temporary versus Permanent Participation.* Most organizations do not provide a permanent context for life experience, as societies often do (i.e., individuals typically do not spend their entire lives in a single organization). Organizational membership often is voluntary, and members generally are free to abandon an organization and seek another one, giving organizations higher turn-over rates than societies.

5) *Goal-Oriented versus Spontaneous Development.* Societies are not organized for a specific purpose, nor do they typically have specific objectives which direct their ac-

tions. Rather, societal action evolves naturally and spontaneously through the temporal-spatial associations of related persons. Organizations, however, are both natural and planned. They are organized consciously as tools to achieve explicit group objectives, and their actions often are goal-oriented.

In my view, these differences are substantial enough to suggest that, in using the "societies writ small" metaphor, we should take care to recognize and accommodate important distinctions between social and organizational systems. Such distinctions are relevant to the present discussion of organizational culture because they indicate that the organizational context (and any cultural phenomena which derive from that context) may be less powerful in shaping individual behaviors and beliefs than will be the larger societal context. Societal influence is pervasive and all-encompassing, yet remains largely implicit, taken for granted, and the individual is less free to choose participation or departure. Organizational influence, on the other hand, is more restricted in its impact, yet at the same time explicit, consciously contemplated, and the individual usually chooses participation voluntarily. Given these differences, we must admit the possibility that societal influences may continue to affect the behavior of individuals in organizations, even to the extent of countermanding organizational goals and objectives may have a tendency to generate resistance in those who view such goals as running counter to their own aims or beliefs.

The fact that organizations are in some ways secondary or subsidiary to larger societies, however, need not necessarily invalidate the metaphor or suggest that organizations do not display or produce distinctive cultures. Social scientists long have accepted the concept of subculture as a construct applicable to subsidiary social groups in complex societies. Subcultures may be defined as patterns of behavior and belief that are unique to a societal subgroup but share significant continuities with the host or larger society (Broom and Selznick, 1973). This construct has been applied somewhat loosely by anthropologists and sociologists to a wide variety of social groupings, including ethnic minorities, social classes, regional populations, ideologically-based sects, and occupational groups resident within larger, complex societies.

In traditional anthropological and sociological usage, however, the concept of subculture suggests a naturally occurring set of patterns, often coterminous with a local community, which influence the total life-way of group members. In other words, like their larger societies, subcultures have a general and pervasive influence on their members' identities and life experiences. Organizations in the United States typically do not exert such an influence on their members, unless such influence is based on the members' commitment to a particular profession or occupation (rather than the organization per se). Military organizations come to mind here; they require a special life style that sets their members apart from the rest of society and creates a distinctive identity for them (Broom and Selznick 1973:76). The subcultural properties of military organizations, however, are based on distinctive aspects of the mili-

tary profession and we might expect that all military organizations will display the same subcultural properties resulting from the influence of military occupational subculture. In such cases, it could be argued that organizational culture may be explained as a function of (or, reduced to the action of) occupational subculture.

Thus we see that most American organizations are neither perfect "societies writ small" (with an all-pervasive influence on organizational members), nor are they distinctive subcultures in their own right (at least not in the traditional sense of that word). What, then, validates the concept of organizational culture? This question becomes even more difficult to answer when we consider the fundamentally multicultural nature of most formal organizations in complex societies. Gregory (1983) has discussed at length the manner in which organizations mirror the cultural diversity and complexity of their societal environments. Because organizational members are enculturated and receive primary (and oftentimes secondary) socialization outside the organization, they enter the organization with multiple social and cultural identities. Organizational members may remain closely tied to ethnic, regional, social class, or occupational subcultures. Indeed, such allegiances often conflict sharply with formal organizational goals and objectives (see for discussion van Maanen and Barley 1984, Morgan 1986). In the extreme, organizations can be conceptualized as a patchwork battleground of competing and conflicting management cliques, occupational groups, and class interests, all imported to the organization from the external social environment. Furthermore, members' experiences in organizations differ sharply depending on their position and role, and it is difficult to imagine organizational processes that would forge integrated bodies of experience and knowledge across all of an organization's many diverse subgroups.

Thinking about the internal diversity of formal organization forces us to rethink the original metaphor on which organizational culture has been premised; i.e., "societies writ small." That metaphor, as it stands, is imperfect in yet another way that has not been mentioned thus far. Specifically, the metaphor is not explicit regarding the complex nature of the "societies" to which organizations are likened. Formal organizations (especially large, bureaucratic ones) are decidedly not like the traditional, small-scale societies classically studied by anthropologists (i.e., they are not stable, isolated, or homogeneous "little communities" as envisioned by early industrial ethnographers; see Holzberg and Giovaninni 1981). Rather, most modern formal organizations are turbulent, multicultural, and heterogeneous, more like the modern complex societies in which they are grounded.

I suggest that the original metaphor might be more useful in helping us think about organizational culture (albeit still imperfect) if it were modified to include one additional word; i.e., "complex societies writ small". Indeed, our metaphoric "societies" must be complex or the metaphor stands in danger of becoming absurd in application (i.e., in what sense is General Motors Corporation "writ small" in relation to a New Guinea tribe or an Alpine village?) Making explicit the complexity dimension of "socie-

ties writ small" is immediately useful in clarifying certain issues and problems in organizational culture research, especially problems that have troubled anthropologists in particular.

First, an explicit recognition of complexity challenges the utility of culture theory in explicating organizational phenomena, and may help to explain why research on organizational culture has left so many members of our discipline with feelings of discomfort and/or dissatisfaction (see for example Gamst 1987). Anthropological concepts of culture have emerged largely from a tradition of research on small-scale, geographically-based groupings such as bands, tribes, chiefdoms, peasant villages, rural enclaves, ethnic and religious minorities, and totalitarian sects. These traditional, small-scale social systems generally display relatively homogenous patterns of social behavior and ideology, and the methods they use to integrate individual variability into a single pattern are both efficacious and compelling. Our concepts of culture were, for the most part, not designed to explain holistic culture or cultural integration in complex societies. Indeed, some of us may not even be certain that holistic culture exists in societies as complex as the United States. When we do ethnography in complex societies, we frequently focus on small, subcultural enclaves whose behaviors and beliefs are most amenable to our concepts and methods (see for example Messerschmidt 1981). Anthropologists have not been very much interested recently (as far as I can determine) in seriously describing and explaining holistic culture as an integrating phenomenon in complex societies such as the United States (with a few notable exceptions, e.g., Harris, 1981, Kottak, 1988).

If formal organizations are, in some less-than-perfect way, analogous to "complex societies writ small", and if cultural phenomena within such social systems parallel those of complex societies, then studies of organizational culture may prompt some of us to reflect that 1) organizations might not have holistic, integrated cultures and those who say they do are either not well informed or dishonest or both, and/or, 2) culture theory as currently formulated may not be entirely suitable or adequate to the task of explicating organizational culture if such exists as an holistic phenomenon, and/or, 3) culture theory needs to be extended to address the issue of cultural integration both in complex societies and formal organizations. Of these three possibilities, I am most inclined to contemplate the latter (although the former two frequently cross my mind).

The addition of a complexity dimension to the "societies writ small" metaphor also may be useful in a second way. Specifically, it sharpens our understanding of the political implications of "managementcentric" research and practice on organizational culture. A number of anthropologists have commented negatively on (and sometimes taken offense at) the implication in organizational culture literature that culture can be planned, created, manipulated and controlled by management (i.e., a "managementcentric" approach; (see for examples Gregory 1983, Gamst 1987, Hamada 1988.) Rather than simply being critical (or taking offense), I believe we should see this literature as reflecting the occupational subculture of

managers. An important part of any manager's job consists of attempting to create and control ideology (Barnard 1938). Creation and control often is exercised through such rational-sounding activities as strategic planning, developing business plans, managing by objectives, holding leadership conferences and retreats, and chairing staff meetings. Such exercises are not often conceived consciously as ideological, but it is through these activities nevertheless that managers create and enforce many of the basic ideas that guide management action (see for example Goldratt and Cox, 1986). It is important to emphasize here that, although managers long have engaged in ideologically-related behavior, they have only recently come to understand and appreciate consciously the power of cultural ideology in organizations. The recognition of cultural ideology as an important contributor to organizational productivity came about largely as the result of direct competition between Japanese and American business organizations, and the American realization that Japanese success was in some way linked to culturally-based ideological constructs which differ radically from those underpinning American management practice (Morgan, 1986).

Having learned the "hard way" that ideology counts in business, managers now want to learn all that they can about planning and commanding this seemingly invisible "corporate weapon." Much current literature on organizational culture seems to imply that management efforts to create and control organizational ideology are equivalent to organizational culture itself (e.g., see Deal and Kennedy 1982, Peters and Waterman 1982, Schein 1985, Kilmann et al 1985, Morgan 1986). The complex society metaphor suggests, of course, that such management efforts do not equate with integrated organizational culture and, furthermore, probably never will. Rather, management efforts represent the action of just one more (albeit very powerful) occupational subculture within organizations, a subculture dedicated to organizational control by whatever means may be available. Ironically, it may be those very managers who are most intent on forcing their own "culture" (i.e., ideology) on other organizational members without sensitivity to multicultural complexities who are least effective in "managing" organizational culture (however that is defined).

The complex society metaphor also may be useful in a third way that is not so immediate; namely, in setting an agenda for anthropological research on the subject of organizational culture. In my view, the most fundamental question facing this field today is the question of cultural integration in multicultural organizations. Stated simply, we need to determine whether formal organizations (as distinct from occupational or professional groups) express or display holistic cultures which overarch and integrate the multiple subcultural forces within their boundaries. Currently, the literature does not address this critical issue adequately. Existing "managementcentric" approaches to the question of multicultural integration simply have not been satisfying or convincing; that is, they have failed to demonstrate that management ideology integrates the total spectrum of subcultural interests represented in mod-

ern organizations (e.g., various occupational groups, labor groups, employee rights groups, and minority groups). On the other hand, studies of occupational cultures by anthropologists and others also have failed generally to address the issue of cultural integration, often leaving us with the impression that organizations are comprised of fragmented and sometimes warring subcultural camps.

If organizational culture exists as an holistic phenomenon, then it should in some way integrate or at least articulate the various organizational behaviors and beliefs of an organization's diverse contingents. Such integration would have to be achieved in spite of the differences between societies and organizations which render organizations relatively less powerful in shaping people's lives. Further, we should be able to identify mechanisms that enable diverse subgroupings within organizations to share bodies of local (i.e., organization-specific) knowledge, and to develop shared interpretations of their organizational world(s). Failing to meet these minimalist requirements, we may need to conclude that what has been labeled organizational culture in the literature actually is management occupational subculture. Even if this turns out to be the case, however, other intriguing research possibilities still lie ahead, especially for those interested in "studying up" (Nader 1972; see also Schein 1987). It would be very enlightening, for example, to explore the possibility of a management occupational subculture by comparing "managementcentric" organizational cultures across organizations. I suspect that we would find them not as different from one another as the current literature would have us believe.

If holistic organizational cultures do exist (as distinct from both national culture and myriad possible subcultures), we may well ask ourselves, what would they look like? Or, stated in more theoretical terms, what qualities and characteristics would we expect of integrated organizational cultures? I have four preliminary responses to these questions.

First, I do not believe that holistic organizational cultures need necessarily be salient to members in their private lives outside the organizational context. Although we have traditionally defined culture as a phenomenon that influences an individual's entire way of life, we may find it more useful to revise this concept somewhat in studying the fragmented worlds of complex society. We could, in fact, define organizational culture as a phenomenon most (or solely) influential within an organization's boundaries, perhaps to the extent of overriding other cultural/subcultural influences which derive their power from bases outside the organization.

Second, as indicated above, I do not believe that an integrated organizational culture will necessarily be shaped and directed solely, or even primarily, by management. I prefer to conceive of culture as a naturally evolving phenomenon that could be influenced by management (and, perhaps, influenced strongly given management's many prerogatives). An integrated organizational culture should, however, also be influenced by many other factors within and outside the organization, especially labor organizations and the perception of the organization held by the surrounding community (as demonstrated by Warner and

Low [1946] more than forty years ago). I agree with Britan and Cohen (1980) that anthropologists could made excellent contributions to organizational theory by showing the ways in which cultural phenomena inside organizations are linked to external organizational environments.

Third, if asked what structures and processes in organizations might be examined for possible clues in the search for cultural integration, I would suggest the following: 1) formal or informal management/employee recruitment and selection procedures; 2) formal or informal education/training activities, whether for new recruits or veterans; 3) informal vertical networks that link formal hierarchical levels in organizations; and 4) processes or circumstances by which local (i.e., site-specific) knowledge becomes widely shared and/or institutionalized in formal organizational structures. Each of these aspects of organizational dynamics have the potential to distinguish organizations from their larger societal surroundings, and to communicate knowledge and interpretations across cultural boundaries, thereby serving as vehicles for multi-cultural integration. In my own work (see for example Baba 1989), I am focusing on the fourth item mentioned above to determine how local knowledge pertaining to technology becomes institutionalized in high technology organizations.

Finally, with respect to methods, I would like to recommend an approach to the study of organizational culture that Elizabeth Briody and I have been using at General Motors Corporation (GM). Over the past four years, one or both of us have had an opportunity to study roughly half a dozen separate and widely varying organizational units within GM. While each study has been unique, both in objectives and research design, we have begun to recognize certain basic patterns of behavior and belief that appear to cross-cut organizational units and resurface again and again during data analysis. We are keeping a separate research journal which records evidence of these unifying patterns, and we are beginning to use these records to support data analysis efforts in general. Although we do not have enough data to formulate a theory of integrated culture at GM, we believe that triangulation across organizational units is an approach that addresses the issue of complexity, and begins to provide clues to the mechanisms that enable integration in large, multicultural organizations.

I would like to close this essay by expressing my conviction that studies of organizational culture can contribute both to the base of fundamental knowledge concerning the structure of complex society, and to the benefit of our discipline. By investigating mechanisms of cultural integration in formal organizations, anthropologists should learn something about the structure and function of integrating mechanisms in larger complex societies. Furthermore, study of organizational culture would require that we define the characteristics of larger cultures in which organizations are based (since we must demonstrate that organizational cultures are distinct from the larger cultural surround). Exploration of either of these topics would encourage (or force) us to consider more seriously the question of an integrated American culture, a challenge which—if accepted—could have a profound influence on our public image and our future role in American society.